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SUBJECT: SERBIA: DELIBERATIONS ON SERBIAN ELECTIONS IN KOSOVO

REF: BELGRADE 322

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) Serbia's caretaker government will meet for the first time to discuss on April 3 how to hold May 11 local and parliamentary elections in Kosovo. No decision is expected. Parties have not yet reached agreement on technical details but Serbian officials generally support holding both national and local elections in Kosovo Serb areas. The Kosovo Ministry intends to assist the Serbian Republican Election Commission in conducting the vote, which may involve plans for remote voting in northern Kosovo or Serbia. The GOS will count votes in the parliamentary elections as has in previous years. However, the GOS plans to work with UNMIK directly to determine how to apply the results. Kostunica's DSS has the most to gain from making the vote itself an electoral campaign issue. End Summary.

Elections "In Coordination with UNMIK"

¶2. (SBU) The GOS expects parliamentary elections will be held in Kosovo on May 11. Assistant Kosovo Minister Ljubomir Kljakic told DATT and poloff, March 29, that his ministry would "bridge" between the Serbian electoral authorities and the international community (UNMIK and KFOR). Stanko Blagojevic, an advisor in the Kosovo Ministry, told poloff, April 2, that the April 3 meeting would likely involve "technical issues" to resolve with the Republican Election Commission (RIK), the organization charged with conducting the vote in Kosovo. The RIK, Blagojevic said, was a "procedurally complicated" body that needed to make arrangements for this vote "well in advance." Blagojevic said these issues would include polling locations and security, and that the Kosovo Ministry would act as a liaison with UNMIK, with which the GOS would "closely coordinate" all election-related matters.

Meeting Agenda

13. (SBU) DS election manager Marko Djurisić told poloff on April 2 that his party hoped to find a solution that would permit both local and parliamentary elections in Kosovo, while avoiding a fight with UNMIK. He said DS wanted to avoid having local elections take place only in the north of Kosovo. "If local elections are going to be held, they need to be in all the Serb areas of Kosovo." Djurisić believed the result of the GOS meeting on April 3 would be renewed contact with UNMIK to discuss how to conduct the vote and what to do with the results.

Minister for Administration and Local Self Governance Milan Marković (DS) told the press that the GOS will discuss how to organize voting for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and whether both Kosovo Serbs residing in Kosovo and displaced Kosovo Serbs would be eligible to vote.

14. (SBU) Bajram Omeragić, a Bosniak MP from the List for Sandžak Coalition told DCM on April 2 that any government decision on voting in Kosovo will require DS and G17 Plus support, since they have a majority in government. He noted, however that the manner such elections were conducted in Kosovo were a concern to him and others in the Sandžak region, which borders northern Kosovo.

Remote Voting

15. (SBU) Blagojević said that the GOS may "modify" voting

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arrangements for technical and security reasons which would include remote voting. He said smaller Serbian villages and enclaves may have voting locations in larger enclaves, or in Northern Kosovo. DSS Vice President Milos Aligrudić told the DCM on March 26 that remote voting was a possibility, perhaps including voting in Serbia for some Kosovo Serbs.

The Results

16. (SBU) While Serbian officials expect parliamentary results to be applied as in previous years, the only plan on how to deal with local election results -- if they take place -- was to negotiate with UNMIK. Assistant Minister Kljakić said on March 29 that local councils in Kosovo should be reelected as "some people have been sitting there too long." Blagojević told poloff April 2 that local elections would be important to have "legitimate authorities" in Kosovo Serb areas, but that this discussion would be the "greatest part" of negotiations between Belgrade and UNMIK.

Comment

¶7. (SBU) Serbian officials know local elections will be a messy issue and are intent on going forward. The Kosovo Ministry will insist that UNMIK negotiate on a plan to hold the vote and accommodate the results. The DSS will make a campaign issue out of DS and other parties' weakness if they appear to be disenfranchising Kosovo Serbs. End Comment.
MUNTER